



Promises by Vontar

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Summary: Sometimes, it's the little things in life that matter. Scenes of life from Eleven and Mike, as they face the future together. A series of one-shots and two-shots.

1. Snowy Days

A/N: Welcome! Promises is a series of one-shots and occasional two-shots about Eleven and Mike as they grow up post-series, so the chapters vary from months after the series to years to (possibly) decades. Enjoy!

Things never really returned to normal after the "Incident". The four best friends – Mike, Lucas, Dustin, and Will – still gathered from weekend to weekend to play D&D, and as always, Mike was the dungeon master; that much remained the same. However, they could all sense a shift, a turning point. Dustin was the one that called Mike out on it – Mike's once-intricately crafted stories were showing loose ends, and his effort and subsequently his grades in school had been dropping for the past month.

After Will fireballed the thessalhydra and everyone had left to return to their families for Christmas, Mike was left alone in his basement, contemplating, and ended up staring at the pile of blankets and pillows that still sat as a fort in the basement of the Wheeler's house. Lucas, Dustin, and Will all wished well for him, and tried their best to cheer him up from time to time, but all to no avail. For him, it seemed like he had lost something in the past month. Something precious.

Eleven was gone.

And for Mike, it felt like a piece of him had gone with her to the Upside Down.

Mike eventually forced himself to tear his eyes away from the alcove where El had once slept (where she had once made a home), and stood up, trying his hardest to forget the painful memories that followed every joyful time he had spent with her (memories that he could not simply *forget*).

Mike needed air. Fresh air. To clear the head. With a twist of the knob, the basement door opened and cold air billowed in on the winter wind. Donning a heavy coat, Mike closed the basement door

behind him and strode out upon the white snow. He breathed in the cold, frigid air, chilling entire his body with every breath. It was a refreshing experience, at least. Paying little attention to where his legs are taking him, Mike juggled his thoughts – friends, Eleven, school, Eleven, family... Eleven. A constant pressure on his mind, El was.

With a sigh, Mike came to a stop, only to realize that the neat rows of houses and cars had already long given way to trees, and that he had strayed far off the beaten path. He had walked all the way to Mirkwood, to the spot where Will had crashed his bike when confronted by the Demogorgon. Glancing at his watch, Mike grimaced when he realized that he had been walking for nearly an hour; all he could hope for was that his mom hadn't noticed, or he would be dead meat after she made sure he was safe.

With a turn, Mike prepared to return home – until a flash of movement popped at the edge of his right eye. Turning his head at speeds that looked painful, he saw the one thing he didn't expect to see in the relative middle of nowhere on a cold winter night – a figure in the woods. The figure in question stood further in then where Will had crashed his bike, a good thirty feet at least. His heart froze, not from the cold, but from the sudden fear that began to grip his body. Had the Demogorgon returned? He didn't know whether to run or scream (or do both) and his mind and body alike were frozen with fear and indecision. That is, until Mike noticed that this figure could not be the Demogorgon – for starters, it was too short, too small. The arms were not nearly long enough. It was definitely a human.

Mike let out a sigh of relief, shaking his head in mild embarrassment for having been shocked frozen, and headed towards the small figure in the distance.

"Hello?" Mike cried, trying to see exactly who it could be. From the size, the figure could've been anyone his age, including Dustin, Lucas, or Will, though the chances of the figure being any of those three were quite low.

As Mike got closer, he started to see more details; that the figure had on a dress, from the outline – so a girl – and – his heart froze again,

for completely different reasons – a blue jacket with squares and stripes.

Not wanting to wait, not wanting to be disappointed, yet not wanting not to hope, Mike rushed forward, breaking through the frozen branches packed with snow – some of which fell on him. He ignored it all, however, reaching forwards. Stumbling out into a clearing, he faced the figure.

Mike didn't believe his eyes.

His voice was quieter, scratchier than he remembered.

"El?"

In front of him, in the flesh, complete with his sister's old, once-pink dress and a slightly oversized jacket was Eleven.

"Mike," she whispered, a small smile dancing on her face. Mike's momentary confusion gave way to his emotions. He rushed forward and enveloped her in a hug, holding on tight as if letting go would allow her to fall back into the Vale of Shadows. The two stayed like that, kneeling on the ground, in a tight embrace, taking each other's warmth, for at least a minute (but probably more).

"How?" He breathed, overwhelmed by a multitude of different emotions. She hugged tighter.

"I promised. Friends don't lie. I came back for you."

"Promise? The Snow Ball?" Mike chuckled a little, loosening away from the hug to face her eye-to-eye. "It might be a little too late for that, but I think you made up for it already." A smile graced his face as he stared into hers. She was a little gaunter, a little less clean, and her hair had grown out longer, but she was still El.

They stayed like that for a while, and Mike didn't mind any of the reprimands he was almost certain to receive from the panic he was likely causing his mom. Sure, it wasn't the Snow Ball, but he had a feeling that it was better.

2. Freedom

The seconds were ticking down to the last summer – the last bastion – of freedom, squashed in between the end of one era and the beginning of another. He could see the second hand just ticking upwards, so close, and getting closer.

The school bell rung and all hell broke loose.

Cheers erupted in the class, as the senior class of 1989 let out their last high school roars, the last roars of pure freedom prior to true adulthood, before dashing out of class and the building for one last time. Mike leaned back in his chair, slightly smiling and savoring the feeling of freedom. The seconds passed as he relaxed alone in the chair, with the teacher still at the front of the room gathering her materials.

"Mike?"

Eleven's voice cut through to Mike, and he quickly turned and stood. El, with a small smile - the one he loved so much - on her face, stood by his desk. The teacher had long since left the classroom, and the two remained alone.

"Hey, El," Mike said, as he embraced her. "How was the last day of school?"

El tilted her head to one side, her shoulder length hair falling to her right shoulder.

"It was the last day of school."

Mike chuckled. "That's about as good a way of putting it as I've ever heard."

Fully standing up, Mike towered nearly a head over El, with his full six-feet in height compared to her shorter five-foot four in height. While she had recovered from her childhood abuse and the time she spent in the Upside Down after several years of healthy meals at the Byers', she was still relatively petite, though what she lacked in

physical intimidation, she made up for with her rather forceful, yet somehow mostly quiet, personality at times, which didn't include her particular set of *abilities*. Her hair, styled as a short pixie cut, had a bow on the side, and combined with the modest skirt and shirt she wore, El was absolutely breathtaking (like always) to Mike.

Mike stared into El's brown eyes and she stared back. Time seemed to slow as the two got closer to each other, relativity likely playing a part in the scheme. El could feel Mike's breath as he leaned in closer, ever so closer.

"There you guys are!" yelled a voice behind El. Startled, both turned to face the door, where Dustin stood with Lucas and Will behind him. The trio had their backpacks slung over their shoulders, and all three were sporting grins that rivalled that of the Cheshire Cat's. Mike and El pulled back in surprise, their irritation mounting at the intrusion.

"So we'll come around at about five o'clock?" questioned Lucas, who had his arms folded over his chest. "Should give us enough time to freshen up for the party."

"Yeah, five's fine," replied Mike, slightly annoyed at the fact that his private time with El had been interrupted. "Five's just fine."

"So we've got about a half hour before Lucas, Will, and Dustin gets here," Mike turned to El, who sat on the couch in the Wheelers' living room. His mom had just pulled out of the driveway, heading towards a party of her own with Joyce, Hopper, and some of the other parents of the "group" to celebrate the graduation of their kids. As such, Mike and El were home alone.

El pointed her head in the direction of the basement door, and Mike nodded. Both of them walked down the basement steps, until they were staring at the small pile of blankets that formed the tent El had once inhabited. It was a bit of a tradition – El would oftentimes go down to the basement to see where she had made her first home, a small pile of blankets at the bottom of a house that was the first place to give her true comfort. They never stayed down there too long for just the fort, though – both agreed to look forward to the future, rather than the horrors of the past. Thus, both went back up to the

top floor after a while, and ended up lounging on the la-z-boy, El on top of Mike.

"Excited?" Mike's voice cut through the silence. El tilted her head up from its original resting position upon Mike's chest.

"About what?"

"Ya'know, being adults, college, all that stuff. Kinda scary, isn't? We won't be able to be so, I don't know, carefree." Mike's mouth twitched. They were both going to Indiana University, El to the School of Education (she wanted to be a teacher) and Mike to the College of Arts and Sciences (he wanted to be a chemist). El sighed, and went back to rest on his chest.

"Mike, we'll be together at Bloomington – it'll be about the same as here. Dustin will even be there too, and Lucas and Will won't be far away." Mike's face didn't change, and he turned to rest on the side of his head. He was afraid of missing Lucas and Will, even though they were all remaining in Indiana, with the latter two going to Purdue for physics and biology, respectively.

"Mike." Mike turned his head back to El, only to feel her soft lips push into his own. Momentary surprise overtook him before he relaxed and embraced El as they both fell deeper into the kiss. After a few moments, they broke apart, both breathing in as stared into each other's eyes. All Mike could think about was how beautiful El looked.

"Relax. It'll be fine."

Before Mike could respond, the doorbell rang throughout the house, causing El and Mike to both look at the door. El quickly hopped off of Mike and the la-z-boy, with Mike slowly getting up after her.

"Thanks." El stopped halfway to the door handle before turning around to look at Mike. She simply smiled and continued walking towards the door, to their friends.

The future was uncertain, but as far as Mike was concerned, he didn't care as long as he could spend it all with El.

3. Fun and Games

"Oh man, I think I bombed that algebra test," moaned Dustin, as the quintet of friends walked out of the school building. The bell had just rung, and everyone was flooding out through the hallways, making navigation through the school for the five friends nigh impossible. Still, the group managed to make it to the bike racks more or less intact, though certainly more ruffled than when they had just left class. All five of them – Mike Wheeler, Dustin Henderson, Lucas Sinclair, and Will and El Byers (legal name "Elle", but she always wrote it as "El") – had their own bicycles, the king of transportation at age thirteen.

"Cheer up! At least it's the weekend. It's D&D time with a sleepover!" Lucas exclaimed. Previously, it would've been hard to see Dustin as the downer and Lucas as the optimist, but since El's stunning entrance into their lives less than five months ago, Lucas had become a lot more upbeat, which perhaps was a justifiable reaction to facing an extraterrestrial monster and living to tell (or in this case, not tell) the tale.

"So I'll see you two at five?" Mike queried Will and El, as he swung one leg over the seat of his bike. The two murmured their agreement, before mounting their own bicycles and heading home. Mike caught El's glance for a moment – she smiled at him and his heart fluttered a bit – before she pedaled off with Will back to the Byers' home, and the other three did the same towards their own homes.

All along the route home, Mike, Dustin, and Lucas biked at a leisurely, cozy pace, enjoying the late March sunshine on their faces, the comfortable mixture of warmth and cool air from winter's last reaches, and each other's company, as they talked about ideas, interests, and cool things in general.

"So, El and you," Dustin suddenly said out of the blue, as they rode along the right side of a street of houses. Mike did a potentially dangerous double-take on his bike, tilting forward while riding before regaining his balance. Lucas laughed off to the side.

"Yeah, when are you going to ask her out?" Lucas teased, following

Dustin's lead. Mike scowled somewhat.

"She's just a friend, like you all. Come on, you've been bringing this up for months," retorted Mike. His blushing cheeks, however, did little to hide his thoughts, betraying him to his feelings.

"Well, I don't see you doing googly-eyes at me or Lucas or Will, and I definitely don't see you blush at any of us. I'm pretty sure that you have a serious crush on her, dude." Dustin's impeccable logic pierced through the air, and Mike snorted as he tried to keep his cool and ride on. The three continued their bike ride as they neared Dustin's street. When they arrived at the intersection of Dustin's house, the trio stopped to split up.

"Hey, look, you like El, and she definitely likes you. It'll work out. I'll see you two in a bit," Dustin finished, as he rode off down his street to his home. His "see you two later" was quickly thrown backwards in the wind toward the other two as he rode off, and all Mike – who had no time to make a meaningful reply to that - and Lucas could do was wave their hands bye a bit before Dustin rode past the hill on his street.

Lucas leaned back into the couch that sat in the Wheeler's basement, his backpack abandoned by the stairs. Mike, on the other hand, was setting up snacks, drinks, and the entire D&D space, to prepare for the imminent arrival of the other three members of the group. The Wheeler's basement was hosting a sleepover as well, so sleeping bags and blankets had been laid out for the five of them all across the floor. Finally, Mike stood up straight at the D&D table, his tasks finished and the basement ready for the start to a lengthy campaign. Silence stood in the basement for several moments before Lucas decided that he had seen enough of the obvious (to everyone but Mike) and that he had to address the elephant in every room Mike was in.

"Dude, seriously, ask out El already." Mike's head whipped around.

"Not you too, Lucas."

"Okay, I can see where this is going. You, Wheeler, think that she

doesn't like you, and you're scared. Oh come on! El killed the Demogorgon to protect you. Didn't Dustin say she saved your life by keeping you from falling off the quarry? Like seriously, it's obvious to everyone but you apparently, but if you ask her out, she'll say yes!"

Mike contemplated Lucas' words for a moment, before opening his mouth to make a reply. Before he could utter a retort, however, the basement door opened, and an enthusiastic "hiya!" came down from the top of staircase. As Mike turned his head, he expected to see an exuberant and excited Dustin at the doorframe; instead, he saw the top of Dustin's head – in front of him was a smiling El, wearing a fairly loose dress that went to her knees. Mike's mouth went dry, as he stared at what he thought had to be an angel. Lucas coughed and snickered, bringing Mike back to reality as El, with Dustin and Will behind her each toting an over-night pack (Will had two – his and El's), came down the stairs. They all greeted each other, but Mike focused on El.

"Hey, uh, El! You look nice. You weren't wearing that earlier," Mike stuttered, his naturally shy personality creeping through.

"Oh, Jonathan ended up giving us a ride over here, so I decided to change into something more comfortable." She gave a little twirl. "Pretty?"

"Uh, yeah, pretty. Really pretty." Mike blushed, and El's cheeks reddened along with him. The others, on the other hand, felt awkward and out of place. Will stood there, smiling. Lucas was on the verge of snickering. Dustin coughed.

"Alright, let's get this campaign started!" Dustin yelled, hoping to break up the awkwardness. It worked, as Mike and El broke out of their own little bubble to rejoin the rest of them, and they all took a seat at the table, transitioning from 1980s suburban American children into great warriors and mages of legend as they sat in for what was to be a long and fulfilling campaign to save the world. Mike glanced at El one more time before starting, and she had a small smile on her face as she looked at him and nodded.

Mike cleared his throat.

"You start in a great hall..."

A/N: I've been wondering whether I should reformat the first chapter, which is currently in first person, to be third person like the rest of the one-shots (or two-shots) Promises will be. Leave a thought in a review on what you think, and thanks for reading! Fun and Games will be continued in chapter 4.

4. Stayin' Awake for the Good Times

A/N: Part two of "Fun and Games". Enjoy!

"... and with a gasp, the demon king falls to his knees, his flaming sword extinguishing itself as his power leaves the world, his mighty obsidian throne, cracking as it loses form and crumbles to the ground. With his last breath, he curses the names of those that have saved the world from his tyranny," Mike dramatically finished, bringing an end to a seven-plus hour campaign. The faces of El, Will, Lucas, and Dustin stared eagerly at their dungeon master. Mike stared back.

"Wait, that's it?" Lucas asked, all of a sudden confused. "What about the brave princess that rebelled against the kingdom?"

"Yeah," agreed Dustin. "Or how about the strange vortex in the Great Library?"

Mike shuffled as he thought about it.

"Well, you se-" he started.

"Mike!" The five of them all turned to stare at the top of the stairs, where one Karen Wheeler stood, one hand on the hip.

"It's 12:30 – way past your bedtime," Mrs. Wheeler exclaimed to Mike. Then she turned to everyone else before Mike could get a retort in. "You all should be cleaning up for bed. Good night!" With that, she closed the basement door, leaving five teenagers to themselves.

Mike clapped his hands together. "Well, I guess that about wraps up that." The other four looked indignant at first, with Lucas and Dustin being the main ones upset that Mike wasn't going to explain the loose ends in his grand tale. Mike held up his hands in resignation.

"Hey, don't blame me. You guys saw my mom."

With some grumbling – some more than others, the four others acquiesced and started to gather up toiletries and bath towels. Mike,

on the other hand, began cleaning up the D&D table, sweeping empty snack wrappers and soda cans into the garbage bin while folding up the board. He was just about done with picking up some of the wrappers that had fallen to the floor when he felt a soft hand fall on his shoulder. Turning around, he saw El's looking down at him.

"Oh hey, El. S-so how did you like D&D? Sorry your first game wasn't longer." El shrugged.

"Don't apologize; it was fine. It was very fun!" Mike visibly brightened up at that as he stood up.

"So you'll play with us whenever then?" El grinned, now looking slightly upwards toward Mike's eyes.

"Definitely."

"El!" yelled Dustin from inside the bathroom. "Are you gonna wash or not?"

"Oh," whispered El, as she quickly gathered her things and entered the now-vacant bathroom, locking the door behind her.

Mike stared at El as she retreated into the bathroom, before he felt a sharp nudge on his right side.

"What the-" Mike exclaimed, as he turned to see Lucas beside him. Lucas made exaggerated eyebrow motions and winks, a large, open grin on his face as he nudged his head toward the closed bathroom door. Sighing, Mike shook his head, and sunk into the nearby couch.

3 Hours Later

"... so they didn't come back af- hey, Lucas, are you still awake?" whispered Mike. Lucas' still, likely sleeping figure lay in the sleeping bag next to Mike's right; El lay directly left of Mike, with Will beside her and Dustin are the other side of Lucas. It was the middle of the night, in the traditional sense, or the earliest hours of the morning. Mike had been wondering whether Lucas fell asleep or not – he hadn't spoken in five minutes – so this was somewhat expected. The goal had been to pull an "all-nighter", but such ambitious goals would

have to wait for another day, evidently. Rolling onto his back, Mike stared at the basement ceiling, barely illuminated by the faint moonlight that crept through the basement windows.

Then he felt a poke from his left side.

"Mike?" El's soft voice wafted through the air, almost music to his ears.

"El? You're awake? It's pretty late," Mike replied, still whispering to avoid waking everyone else up.

"Mike, I have something to tell you," El responded, ignoring Mike's query.

A hesitant Mike found his voice wavering. "Yeah?"

"I like you." A pause.

"I like you too. You're a great friend."

El sat up, shaking her head.

"No, no. I mean... that I like like you. In the kissing way."

Mike's eyes widened, and he sat up as well. Warily looking at their presumably sleeping friends, he stood up, shaking his blanket off as he ruffled his sleeping back under his feet trying to stand. After helping a slightly bewildered and confused El up to her feet, he led the two of them to the bathroom, where he closed and locked the door behind them.

"Mike? What's going on?" El asked, staring at Mike. The two stood face-to-face parallel to the door, and absentmindedly, El noticed that Mike had grown considerably in the last few months, to the point where she couldn't see the top of her head in the mirror behind him due to his height.

Mike blinked once, and then reached out to one of El's hands. Claspig it, he breathed.

"El, I-I like you too, in that way." El beamed at him, a mixture of

relief and happiness on her face – the same expression, incidentally, that was on Mike's face as well.

"Mike." "El."

The two blinked simultaneously, as they spoke simultaneously. The two looked at each dead in the eyes, and then chuckled quietly, humored by the overlap.

"You go first, El," Mike whispered, the humor still playing on his face in the form of a grin (one that El frankly quite liked to see on him).

El smiled (an expression that Mike loved to see on El, because he thought she looked like a beautiful angel whenever she did smile), and lightly coughed, steeling her nerves.

"I was wondering about something... at school, I heard some of the other girls talking about it... will you go to the Spring Ball with me?"

Silence pervaded the air, as Mike's eyes widened for the second time of the night (or morning) before he finally found his voice.

"Yea- yeah, of course! I was going to ask that too!"

Beaming, El wrapped her arms around Mike, the two joyful and exuberant. After a few moments, they pulled away from each other, staring deeply into one another's eyes, before El gathered her courage.

El leaned forward quickly and bumped both of their noses together.

"Ah!" Mike grunted, as his head was pushed back unexpectedly. El, mortified at her error and failure, quickly apologized, though Mike soon recovered. Chuckling, he again looked at El.

"Well, that was... unexpected." El shared his smile. They locked eyes again, for what had to be the hundredth time that night, and this time, both leaned forward slowly, meeting in the middle as their lips touched. This time around, it lasted longer than the impromptu one Mike began in the school cafeteria, with both of them now committing to it. Breaking apart gently, El gave her trademark small smile, while Mike was in an interesting state of happiness and "oh-

my-god-did-I-just-do-that".

"Well, I guess, we should, uh, get back to bed, huh?" Mike broke the silence, scratching the back of his head with one hand.

"Yeah," El softly replied. They both smiled at each other as they turned to the bathroom door – happy with what had transpired in the bathroom at three-thirty in the morning on a Saturday, and content with each other's presence.

"Oh crap!" Lucas whisper-yelled, as he, Will, and Dustin scrambled from a position less than a meter from the bathroom door back to their sleeping bags to pretend that they weren't just spying on their two friends finally get together.

5. Kisses

Over the years, Mike and El had gotten much better at kissing – something that tended to happen when two people liked each very much and also happened to stay together for a lifetime. Vast improvements in technique were made by both participants, with experience and trial and error over the years improving the enjoyableness for both of them compared to Mike's rushed, full-on surprise kiss in the cafeteria that one dark night and El's accidental bump-on-the-nose attempt.

Then again, it's not as if anyone's first kiss ever set a high standard.

For what had to be at least the hundredth time over the years they've spent together, El and Mike are watching *The Empire Strikes Back*, cuddled together on Mike's couch in the Wheelers' basement – Mike had successfully persuaded his dad to let him put the old television set in the basement for the group when the Wheelers got a bigger one for the living room. The two of them – in their normal Saturday morning tradition for the past three and a half years – were alone, with the two always spending time together without the presence of Dustin, Lucas, or Will at least one time a week. The others had no issues with this schedule.

The couch, a new one which wasn't as large as the previous couch that used to be able to fit all five of them on it at once, felt more cramped than ever before; while it was smaller than the old couch, it had never failed to be able to squeeze at least three of them onto it in the past. Within the past two years, however, it had gotten more and more cramped, to the point where now to the pair of sixteen-year-olds, it felt more like a loveseat than a regular couch. It wasn't as if either of them complained about it, though.

Their reactions during much of the movie were the expected ones for whenever they watched *Empire* – Mike paid close attention to most of the Hoth sequences, especially the battle between the Imperial walkers ("Seriously, they look like big metal camels." – Mike) and the snowspeeders, and then watched the subsequent asteroid field scene with equally rapt concentration. When things started to slow down in

the movie, however, Mike sat back in relaxation, having finished watching some of his favorite scenes in the movie already. With most of his other favorite scenes on the other end of the movie, he sat back to focus on the most important person in his life, who just so happened to be the person he spent every Saturday morning with.

El was equally absorbed in the movie, *The Empire Strikes Back* being one of her favorite movies of all time as well. As she was still leaned forward, paying close attention to the film, Mike admired just how angelic she was – from her stylish pixie cut to her perfectly formed facial features to her cute lips that he just wanted to always kiss.

Getting closer to her, Mike snuggled up against El and whispered in ear. "El."

El turned sideways, slightly annoyed. "Mike, not now – movie," she responded, pointing at the TV screen which currently showed Leia Organa and Han Solo aboard the *Millennium Falcon*, desperately trying to escape the clutch of Darth Vader and the Galactic Empire.

Mike wrapped an arm around El, bringing them closer together. Despite her earlier annoyance at the interruption and the attention she put into the movie, El smiled. The two of them curled up against one another for a bit, ostensibly watching the movie but in reality paying more attention to each other.

"Hey, El."

"Yeah?"

"Do you think we can just sit here forever, together?" El playfully put a hand to her chin, as if in deep thought as she scrunched up her forehead.

"Hm... I'm gonna have to go with a 'no'. Unfortunately."

Mike clicked his tongue in faux annoyance, nestling his head against El's as consolation for the bad news.

"Well, I guess that's just too bad. At least we have a few more years together." El suddenly sharply sat up, surprising Mike who fell into the void where El had been reclining.

"Wait – what do you mean only a few more years?" El quickly asked, a slightly confused and hurt expression on her face. Mike held his hands up as if to say he were innocent of some crime.

"Woah, woah, woah. I just meant that we'll only be together in Hawkins for a few more years, then it's college after that – for the both of us; together." El's expression softened, and Mike fully understood what had happened.

"Hey, you didn't think I would, well, *leave* you, did you?" Mike softly questioned, one hand gently cupping El's left cheek. Her hand sprung up to clasp onto his. Bringing them closer together with his other hand, Mike put both of his hands on El's shoulders, and stared her directly in the eyes.

"I would never leave you behind. You know why?"

El remained silent.

"Because I love you. I always have, and I always will." At this, El looked upwards, the hint of a small smile forming on her lips. Mike leaned in, capturing those lips with his own, wrapping his arms around her as she did for hers around him. Their kiss became deeper as they both gave more into it; both put more into it, with the kiss becoming heavier as they rolled backwards onto the couch, one of Mike's hands on the side and around the back of El's head while both of hers reached his neck...

"Sir, sir! I've isolated the reverse power flux coupling!"

Both of them broke apart as Han and Leia did the same on screen. Gasping slightly, both mildly out of breath from the deep kiss, El and Mike looked back at the television as C-3PO simultaneously distracted the on-screen couple as well as the real-life couple. The two simply looked at each other as Han, annoyed, replied to C-3PO while Leia just slipped off-screen.

Then El and Mike burst out into laughter over the situation, the hilarity of it too much for either of them to contain. It took nearly half a minute before they regained control of themselves and, with mirth still plainly evident on their faces, smiled at one another before

reclining once again to a cuddling position on the loveseat-like couch to watch the movie.

"Ya' know, I like Han and Leia's relationship a lot," El commented, as the movie continued its course with Luke, Vader, and the Emperor each gaining screen time.

"I've noticed," replied Mike. It was pretty obvious, at least to him – the two had dressed up as Han and Leia for Halloween just the year before. It wasn't as if he was going to complain – he thought she looked particularly beautiful in the snow-white jumpsuit that Leia had sported in Empire (coincidentally, or perhaps not coincidentally, El thought Mike looked quite handsome with the trademark vest and clothing of the famous smuggler who made the Kessel Run in less than 12 parsecs).

Mike turned to El with a grin. "So am I your dashing rogue and scoundrel?"

El laughed.

"Seriously? You're way too straight shooting to be a rogue, much less a *scoundrel*." El slurred the last word in a tone that sent shivers down Mike's spine – in a good way, that is. Mike pretended to pout, and El swung an arm over him and pulled him closer to her.

"You're still cool either way," El whispered, inciting a smile on Mike's face. After quickly pecking Mike on the cheek, El refocused on the movie, and Mike followed suit, content with life at the moment – watching his favorite movie in the world with his favorite person in the world.

El and Mike often kissed to show their affection for one another, and for both of them, each kiss was more enjoyable than the last. Practice makes perfect, right?

A/N: Thanks for reading! This one was a bit more impromptu than some of the other ideas, but I hoped you enjoyed it! Leave a review or follow if you like it, and stay tuned for more. On that

note, I'm planning to standardize updates to Saturdays every week, but given how much work I currently have, we'll see how closely I can follow that schedule ;)

6. That One Halloween

"Hey El, are you ready yet?" Mike asked through the wooden door of the bathroom. He and everyone else – Dustin, Lucas, and Will – were all waiting on El to finish putting on her costume for Halloween, 1986. Mike leaned against the wall beside the door while the other trio of friends sat around the couches of the basement; they had all gathered at Mike's house after school, having stopped only to pick up costumes at their own houses before spending the rest of the time in the basement for the past two hours waiting for the time to begin. At seven o'clock, and with the moon rising and the sun fully set, it was time for the group to hunt for treats (no one particularly wanted any tricks, given their history).

Finally, the bathroom door's lock clicked, and Mike pushed off the wall and wheeled around to face the door – and stared. El, with one hand on the door and another on the doorframe, was dressed as Princess Leia from Star Wars, or rather, more specifically *The Empire Strikes Back*. Clad in the white jumpsuit, El's costume was completed by her cream color vest and grey wedge boots; since El had short hair, she went without the extensive hair braid Leia had running across the top of her head in the film. To the fifteen-year-old Mike, she wore the costume *very* well. He gulped. Dustin snickered at Mike's reaction. El raised her eyebrows at Mike's reaction.

"Mike?" El asked, coming forward out of the bathroom after leaning over to grab the bag of school clothes she wore earlier. Mike snapped back to reality and smiled, readjusting his own jacket out of nervousness. Mike was dressed as Han from *The Empire Strikes Back*, and wore the familiar white shirt, blue jacket, brown pants and holster complete with replica blaster. When he first brought up the idea of dressing like Han and Leia for Halloween to El, she had readily agreed, but Mike had made the age old mistake of doing it in front of his friends; to say the least, Dustin and Lucas, especially, took the maximum enjoyment possible out of teasing their friend about his choice, though they liked the idea and thought it was cool. El just thought it was adorably cute, and immediately agreed. Thus, they were here, on Halloween night, dressed as none other than the most famous and beloved sci-fi couple to date.

"Let's go guys," Mike said, taking the lead and grabbing his cloth candy bag. "Time for some candy." The others gave a cheer, and grabbed their own bags.

Soon, they were out of the basement door, with barely a word from Mike's mom at the top of the stairs ("Stay safe and be back by ten!") before they were out on the streets to get some treats. At first it was formulaic, knocking on the doors of houses on each side of the Wheelers' house's road, but as they left that street, they wandered a bit, having done no prior planning on a route. Dustin joked with Lucas and Will as Mike and El walked slightly in front of them, holding hands in the cold night. Soon, they came to a stop at an intersection between two neighborhood streets, staring at the bright light in front of them.

"Is that a flare in the middle of the street?" Will questioned, the five of them all staring at the bright object lit burning in front of them in the middle of the intersection.

"Yeah," Lucas replied. "Yeah it is." Dustin went forward, and with a big grin, grabbed the flare.

"Hey guys, look!" Dustin smiled, waving around the flare in one hand.

"Dude!" Mike yelled. "Put it down before yo- I don't know, you hurt yourself!" Dustin waved his other hand, still clutching his candy bag, dismissively, before playfully taking a whiff of the flare – and then began violently coughing.

"Woah! You okay?" Lucas cried, rushing forward toward the still coughing Dustin, who raised a hand upwards toward Lucas to signify that he was okay. Lucas warily looked at Dustin, still trying to wheeze and cough out the last bit of whatever he had inhaled, and stepped backwards. El stared at Dustin with a mixed look of worry and amusement as Mike rolled his eyes and clasped El's hand again. Waving a hand at everyone else, Mike gestured for them to continue, with Lucas still patting Dustin's back and Will softly smiling at the pair.

After knocking on a few more doors to get back on track with the annual candy-getting fest, the group stumbled upon an odd house.

There was nothing wrong with the house, per say, but the trouble (or fun, depending on how you think about it) started when the door opened.

"Trick or treat!" the five yelled in unison, holding out candy bags. The man who opened the door, a cleanly shaven thirty-something, looked at the five, before speaking.

"You all really want candy?" Dustin looked at Lucas, and then shrugged.

"I guess, yeah," Dustin said, a little confused. The others nodded in concurrence.

"Well then..." the man's voice trailed off for a few seconds, before he spoke again. "Make a human pyramid."

"A what?" Mike asked, taken aback.

"A human pyramid – you know, where people kneel on others' backs. On the lawn," the man explained. The five of them simply looked at each other with a "is-this-serious" look before Dustin, still slightly wheezy, shrugged.

"Might as well guys," Dustin said, glancing at Lucas, who also shrugged in acquiescence. There wasn't much to lose.

The five friends gathered on the man's lawn, figuring out exactly how the pyramid would work. Deciding on a Mike-Lucas-Dustin base with a Will-El upper layer, the three boys first knelt down on all fours, before nodding to Will and El, who both climbed on top the three boys. They heard a laugh from the door, and glancing up, the five saw the man, now with his wife, laughing at the human pyramid; the man's wife also had a mirthful smile on her face, and she was clutching a basket of candy.

"Alright, alright, that's all good – tis all in good fun," the man gestured, and Will and El got off, allowing Mike, Dustin, and Lucas to stand up. Brushing off any stray leaves, the five friends walked back to the front door, where the man's wife handed each a generous handful of candy, before the man and his wife retreated back into the

house, waved good-bye, and closed the door. Mike turned and stared at El, Dustin, Lucas, and Will.

"What just happened?"

"I don't know, dude, but let's continue," Lucas rationalized, and so they went.

The night was getting older and less and less people were seen on the streets trick-or-treating. After finishing up a couple of more streets in between breaks ("Oh geez I really shouldn't have sniffed that flare" – Dustin), the quintet agreed to start to head back to Mike's house, before they realized a fatal issue with that plan – they were lost. None of them remembered the winding route they walked to get there, and time only moved forward; Mike had no intentions of facing his mother's wrath over this.

"Ah!" Lucas exclaimed after a few moments of contemplation, before swinging his backpack around to open it. Rummaging through it, he pulled out a flashlight and folded map of Hawkins. Looking up, he saw everyone else with the same expression on their faces, all staring at the map.

"What? I come prepared." Lucas flicked up the flashlight before unfolding and examining the map.

"Alright... Roane Street?" Lucas swung the flashlight to the street sign. Roane Street. "Got it."

"Cool," Mike said, mildly impressed by Lucas' preparedness. "Lead the way." They followed Lucas' flashlight and map, stopping briefly only to update their position on the map. Before long, they were all back on the familiar street the Wheelers' house sat; the lights of the houses on the street still shone and there were still a few children milling about for candy.

"Whew, on time," Lucas said, glancing at his watch. "With about forty-five seconds to spare." The group wasted no time speed-walking to the basement door of Mike's house and entering, feeling the welcome blast of heat wash over them after three hours of cold. Checking back in with Mike's mother upstairs ("I'm glad you all came

back on time"), the three of them – Lucas and Dustin had to return home promptly, leaving only Mike, El, and Will at the Wheelers' – relaxed into the basement couch, waiting for Jonathan to come pick his younger siblings up. El, still dressed up as Leia, was nearly asleep on Mike's shoulder and Will was upstairs getting some punch and snacks.

"Hey, El, you awake?" El shifted her head slightly, nodding a bit while still leaning on Mike's shoulder. "Did you have fun?"

"Yeah," El replied, resting. "We should do this again."

"By this, do you mean the trick-or-treating, or the dressing-up-as-a-fictional-couple thing?"

El lifted her head, looking into Mike's eyes.

"Both," she said, with a small smile.

Mike cleared his throat. "Well, erm, I also wanted to say, that, ya'know, you look really pretty in this costume," Mike stuttered, before thinking about what he said a little more. "Wait! I mean, you're always pretty, it's just that you look even more, uh, I mean, you look cute in your costume..." Mike's voice trailed off near the end.

El tilted her head with a soft smile on her face, before replying.

"Thanks. For what it's worth, I think you look very handsome in your costume." Mike blushed, and two seemed to draw closer together before meeting in the middle, and the simple action developed into a deep kiss that seemed to ignite a fire in Mike's heart...

The basement door opened, and Will stepped in with a plastic cup of punch and a plate of cookies. He paused, staring at his adopted sister and one of his best friends interlocking lips. The couple, startled by the sudden sound of the door, burst apart now that Will was here, and they awkwardly smiled at each other and Will as he descended with his goodies. The three diverted their attentions to the plate of snacks, talking, laughing, eating, and enjoying each other's company until Jonathan arrived to pick the two Byers up.

As Will and El made to leave with Jonathan waiting in his car outside, Mike stopped El with a gentle touch.

"I had a lot of fun tonight. See you tomorrow?" Mike said, as Will made his way toward the car.

"Yeah, definitely," El replied, before pecking Mike on the lips for a good night, and striding off towards the car. Mike waved bye one last time as Jonathan, El, and Will waved in return and the car drove off. Standing just outside his front door, the chill was beginning to set in as the night grew darker, but for Mike, it only seemed mild as he was enveloped by the warmth of the fire ignited in his heart.

A/N: Hey guys! Sorry for the delay... only a week late, so that's alright, right? Anyway, this is pretty late for a Halloween chapter, but I'm hoping that you all still have some Halloween spirit. And in case anyone was curious, the flare and the pyramid did happen once when I was trick-or-treating. Anyway, follow, favorite, and/or review - thanks for reading!

7. Jealousy

A/N: Well, I'm back. For reference, this chapter takes place about a week before the sleepover in Chapter 2, "Fun and Games".

Lunch

El bit into her sandwich, and chewed slowly as she thought about the day so far. Fridays were usually good, but this was an exception.

"Hey, Lucas," she suddenly spoke up, and the mentioned boy, who sat across the table from her, looked up from his own lunch expectantly.

"Yeah?"

"Do... do you think I said something bad to Mike today?" Lucas sighed. Mike, who usually spent each day at lunch sitting right beside El and who was always excited to talk with and spend time with El, decided that he wanted to eat lunch in Mr. Clarke's room; Will and Dustin had decided to join him, leaving only El and Lucas in the cafeteria. It was an odd circumstance, El and Mike being separated during lunch (for they usually ate together, whether in Mr. Clarke's room or the cafeteria), which itself was led up to by an unusually frosty Mike the entire morning. Looking around the school cafeteria, Lucas finally responded.

"He'll come around. Probably by the end of school today."

El nodded, and the pair returned to their lunches. As she softly chewed on her ham-and-cheese sandwich, El's thoughts returned to the beginning of the morning, in an effort to track down whatever had caused the current conundrum...

4 hours earlier

"Hey El! Will!" Mike cried out, as he walked his bike into the school bike rack – El and Will happened to be pulling in at the same time.

"Morning Mike," El replied, a small smile on her face; Will also gave his usual morning greeting. Before long, Lucas and Dustin joined them as they arrived at school on their own bikes, and the five walked toward class, with El and Mike, like usual, already deep in conversation between the two of them, while the others walked alongside in their own conversation. Just before they reached the stretch of lockers right before their homeroom's door, a cry from behind stopped the group.

"Hey Elle!" The five friends turned simultaneously to face the speaker. The speaker in question was a relatively tall, well-built and grinning blond boy, flanked by two of his friends. Rex Gavin was the star football player in the Hawkins Middle football team, and as such, was one of the most popular kids on campus. He was pretty much a complete unknown to the group, but nonetheless, they stopped and waited for him to walk up to them. Rex, who was at least half a head taller than Mike, the tallest of the group, lifted an eyebrow as he faced all five of them.

"Can I speak with Elle alone?" he asked, politely enough to seem normal but strong enough to show that he wanted to speak with only her, and away from the other boys. Mike and the others looked at El, and she hesitantly nodded.

"We'll wait for you in Mr. Clarke's room," Mike whispered, with his hand on her shoulder, before the four boys turned and walked to class.

"So Elle..."

Six minutes and twenty-two seconds later

Mike idly paced back and forth between his desk and the front of Mr. Clarke's desk. The room was relatively empty, except for a pair of girls near the back of the room who talked quietly between each other. The morning was still early, and even Mr. Clarke was not in the room yet. Dustin, Lucas, and Will sat at their desks, anxiously watching their friend pace and grow more heated.

"It's been a long time! How long does a short talk take?" Mike blurted

out. He had stopped pacing and was now staring at the three seated boys. Lucas blinked, and checked his watch.

"It's been, like, six minutes. I don't know why you're getting so upset and worried about this," Lucas replied, with Will slightly nodding his agreement.

"Upset? I'm not upset. Or worried. It's just that, ya'know, Rex is a jerk, and I don't want him to hurt El or anything."

Dustin lifted an eyebrow at that. "Hurt El? You're kidding me, right? El, who flipped over a van?" Dustin snorted. "More like El hurting Rex."

The door to Mr. Clarke's room opened, and El stepped in, backpack slung over one shoulder. She slowly closed the door before Mike got to her.

"El! What did Rex say? What did he want?" Mike hurriedly said. El looked taken aback by the intensity of Mike's words for a moment.

"Um, he just wanted to know whether I would go with him to watch a movie tomorrow." Mike's heart stopped for a few seconds.

"What did you say?"

A pause.

"I said yes," El replied. "He seems friendly enough, and it felt like it would be mean to refuse him for such a small thing. I wanted to see the movie anyway. Did I do something wrong?"

Mike's mouth twitched a bit while the others had wide eyes behind him. He swallowed before replying.

"No, no, you didn't anything wrong. I hope the date goes well." Mike had a hollow sort of smile on his face. Quickly, he turned and moved to his seat before El could reply. She wanted to say something more, but other kids started entering the classroom, so she took her customary seat behind Mike, who stared unflinchingly forward.

Four PM, same day

El walked out of eighth period, somewhat dejected. Mike had avoided her practically the entire day, and Lucas' words at lunch seemed far away. Just as she was about to exit the school building and head for her bike, however, a cry from behind stopped her.

"El!" She turned. Mike stood behind her, one hand outstretched as if to stop her before she got too far away for him to reach her. She stopped, half-turned around, and waited for Mike to close the distance between them. At this point, the school hallway was deserted apart from the two of them, and the silence was deafening for the few seconds that stretched into an eternity as El, half-turned, stared straight at Mike, who stood sheepishly with both arms hanging limply as his sides.

"I- I want to apologize," Mike blurted out, avoiding El's eyes by looking at her mouth. "I acted stupidly today, and..." his voice trailed off as El put a hand on his shoulder.

"Mike." El stared straight into Mike's wide eyes. "It's fine. I understand what happened."

Mike smiled, and El was happy.

Sunday

"Hey, El, how was your date, by the way?" Mike asked, over the sound of the movie being played in the living room of the Wheelers' house. Mike had the whole group over for a bit of fun before the weekend was over, so they all decided on a movie to relax with before returning to school the next day.

"The movie was okay. Wasn't as good as I had hoped though." Mike waited for the part that he was more interested in.

"Rex is nice enough, I guess. Not really interested in him though."

Mike's heart soared as El snuggled closer to him.

8. Guardians

The punch hurt a lot, but Mike was willing to take it; he had no intention of appearing weak in front of mere bullies. Crumpling to the ground, he did his best to breathe, and tried to push back up before another fist came rocketing toward him, this time in a hook to his left cheek. He tumbled to the right, falling back into the gravel. As he groaned, Mike felt the sharp rocks cutting into his skin as his tormenters loomed over him. It was just like middle school all over again. Troy and James were long gone, no longer daring to even come close to any of them out of sheer fear of El, but these high school bullies – upperclassmen – had no such knowledge of what El could do, and Mike, a still rather short, small, and shy freshman, looked to be easy pickings to them.

"Ya punk," one of them, a scraggly looking senior with long messy hair, grunted out as he kicked Mike in the side, eliciting a yell of pain from the downed boy. "Shouldn't have made Roy look bad in front of everyone. Serves ya right."

Mike, for his part, just tried his best to block out the pain.

Earlier that day, lunchtime at Hawkins High School

Mike plopped down with his sack lunch beside El, who gave him a small smile before taking another bite of her sandwich. Dustin had yet to show up, but Will and Lucas were already sitting across from El, and greeted Mike as he joined them.

"Man, that geometry quiz was killer compared to anything we got in algebra," groaned Mike as he pulled it out his own sandwich and slowly peeled off the plastic wrap. Lucas sighed.

"Really? Crap, I've got it after lunch and I haven't studied yet." He reached into his backpack and retrieved a spiral notebook which he flipped open and began studiously (and hurriedly) peering over the random and haphazard geometry notes he had taken during the few weeks they had been enrolled. Meanwhile, Will, quiet as ever, looked back into his small bag of chips before fishing out another piece, and

Mike and El sat quietly beside each other while chewing on their sandwiches, enjoying both their food and their closeness.

"Alright guys!" came a yell, and the four turned to see Dustin hurrying over to them. In his attempt to snag an open seat to Mike's right, he accidentally bumped into an older student before putting his backpack on the ground and pulling his lunch out. Before he could start, however, a hand roughly pulled him on his shoulder and Dustin fell out of the lunch bench.

"Alright, dweeb, that's it," the older student that Dustin had bumped snarled. His hair, which might've once been meticulously maintained by a possibly unhealthy amount of hair gel, was now slathered in green beans, while his mouth and nose still had tomato sauce from the spaghetti meal he had been eating. The upperclassman raised a fist, ready to strike the clumsy shocked freshman.

"Woah, hey, we don't need to do this," Mike suddenly spoke out loud, and the upperclassman stopped. Glaring at Mike, he dropped Dustin back onto the ground before turning fully to face him. Standing up, Mike realized that this upperclassman was easily a head taller than him and likely considerably more muscular. Still, he stood his ground. Before he decided on a reply, the upperclassman eyed El out of the corner of his eye, and an eyebrow of his raised.

"Well, looky here, you're not a bad looker. Why're you hanging out with these dorks?" He attempted to smooth out his hair, while El maintained her stoic, unimpressed look. He moved closer to El. "Hey, why don't you come sit with us? You can tell your friends that you hang out with Roy Batson."

El scoffed. "Why would I want to sit with you? It's like you're hopped up on extra shots of testosterone." Roy's face quickly turned into a snarl.

Suddenly, Mike turned and shoved the older high school backwards, who, off-balance already from his about-to-be punch, tripped backwards over Dustin's heavy backpack and fell backwards into his spaghetti again, nicely slathering the back of his head with the red tomato sauce. Roy moved to get up, but was quickly hindered by one of his friends, who placed a hand firmly on Roy's arm.

"What's going on over here," came the voice of the teacher, having walked over here. Roy, smooth as ever, grabbed a nearby napkin and wiped off the majority of the tomato sauce.

"Nothing, sir," Roy began, a pleasant and affable smile affixed on his face, "I was just introducing myself to these young freshmen here and I must've accidentally tripped over something. Otherwise, I wouldn't have gotten tomato sauce everywhere." He gave a little chuckle, as if to make the point that it was all due to his own clumsiness. The teacher, apparently satisfied with Roy's take of the situation, simply nodded and strode off to some other part of the cafeteria. Instantly, Roy's smile dropped, and he glared at Mike before sitting down again with his friends. Mike, for his part, felt a chill run through his body as El nudged him back into his seat.

Back to Mike getting acquainted with the ground

Mike grunted as another kick came in. However, as he waited for the next attack, it never came. He warily opened an eye.

"Stop it." Two simple words were like the chorus of an angel to the downed boy, doubly so considering that the girl who uttered them was like an angel to him anyway.

"Looky here, the little girl wants to play," crooned one of the seniors, standing up and making his way toward said 'little girl'. El, for her part, simply stood there. Even as the fist came hurtling toward her, she stood there, looking stoically upon the situation.

"Umph," the senior grunted, landing hard on his back. As quick as the wind, El had moved forward and kicked him in the gut, easily dodging his punch.

When she was first adopted by the Byers, Chief Hopper still came around often. Early on, he discovered that she used her powers often enough to protect the boys from harm. He found nothing wrong with that, but under the necessity of hiding El's powers as best as possible from the world at large (he had no intention of calling another federal government agency upon their heads), he quickly enrolled her in a karate class. That was two years ago.

"Uh," one of the seniors backed away, leaving two more standing near Mike as the third fled. The last two charged at her, but within the count of a brief few seconds, both were similarly down for the count, having been defeated swiftly. Of course, it wasn't exactly fair to them that El could easily augment her karate abilities with her powers, giving her access to what appeared to either be superhuman strength or extreme talent, but it wasn't as if El cared about being fair to bullies.

"Mike, are you alright," she whispered, kneeling to the ground and caressing his head. He had a bit of blood leaking out of his nose, and likely had other bruises all over his body, but was otherwise fine.

He chuckled mirthlessly. "Why is it that you always rescue me?"

"We protect each other, Mike. You did your part for me. And now, I did my part for you," she responded softly, running a hand through his hair.

Mutually protecting each other. Mike could live with that. After all, to each other, they were guardians.

9. When It Happens

There are times in life when one must simply suck in their breath, puff out their chest, and throw caution to the wind. In an ever-changing world, nothing remains constant, and if you tarry too long, time will carry away your song – the song being a proclamation of love and time being the proverbial wind blowing so hard that the girl standing a foot in front of you can't hear a single word of what you're desperately trying to say.

An oddly specific set of circumstances, yes, but in life, Mike Wheeler has learned to never question the odds.

February 13, 1986 – Lunch

Mike felt his gut implode in tension. Fear wracked his nerves in a way he hadn't felt since staring at the Demogorgon. Utterly frozen in his seat, he placed his hands on the table in front of him. He wasn't sure whether or not he was sweating yet, but under the intensity of the interrogating glare, he felt like there were already beads of sweat rolling down his forehead.

Across the table, Eleven curiously looked at her closest friend, confused by his anomalous behavior as evidenced by a single raised eyebrow. Rolling her eyes, El shrugged and went back to her delicious sandwich, ignoring the strange actions of Mike. He had been acting weirder in recent days, but El chalked it up to the incoming Valentine's Day dance, which was, funnily enough, scheduled to be on the fifteenth, the school organizers having decided that a Saturday night would be more appropriate for the event.

Mike had his work cut out for him. Ever since the transition to high school, El could see how popular Mike had become. The boy had grown from an awkward middle school nerd into an athletic, albeit still nerdy, high school heartthrob, and more than one – scratch that, barely less than all – of the girls in their grade had a crush on him. El felt a small twinge of ... well, *something* at that thought.

Absentmindedly wondering who Mike would choose out of his many admirers to go to the dance with (and simultaneously ignoring that pang she still felt in her chest), El continued to chew on her sandwich.

February 13, 1986 – End of School Day

El leaned back into her chair, rubbing her eyes tiredly as she waited for everyone else to filter out of the classroom. The day had been long. No fewer than fifteen girls had asked what Mike liked, on a series of topics ranging from colors to types of chocolate. Evidently, some were willing to go further than others. She had been tempted to give them all wrong answers, to make them embarrass themselves in front of Mike so he wouldn't choose them, but she just couldn't stoop to that level of pettiness. Instead, she put on a nice smile and patiently went over that his favorite color was a rich brown color and that his favorite chocolate bar was Crunch.

Finally deciding that she had waited long enough for the flow of traffic out of the high school to stop, she finally got up, hefted her bag onto her shoulder, fixed her skirt, and strode out of the classroom. As expected, the hallways were empty, save for the occasional teacher or student still trying to get their locker open. With the path clear, she made her way to the side exit, where she and the rest of her friends regularly parked their bicycles. Pushing open the door, she found the rack empty, save two bikes and a Mike.

He stood there solemnly, staring into the distance beyond the high school. The wind, picking up quickly in speed and intensity, blew his hair, which was still unruly and long, around in a way that made him seem like a main character in an action-adventure movie. Turning his head slowly, his eyes widened at the sight of El, and he flipped his backpack to his front, one strap still over a shoulder.

"El!" he cried, walking forwards. For her part, El's heart was pounding, though if one asked her specifically why, the clearest answer she could give would still baffle theoretical physicists and psychologists alike.

"Mike?" she asked, her words nearly being blown away by a sudden

gust of wind. She smoothed out her hair, which, since it was still rather short, was easy to maintain, especially on a windy day such as this one.

Mike stood in front of her, his tall form towering over her lithe build, but his face remained impassive. Finally, he seemed to figure something out in his head, because he unzipped his backpack and pulled out a non-descript rectangular box covered in plain white wrapping paper.

"Uh, well," he stuttered, tripping over his words as he paused to consider his next move. El's heart beat faster. She wanted to say something, but her lips seemed unable to move. Her throat felt parched.

"I-" Mike finally began to speak again, but even as his lips moved, a sudden gust of wind, stronger than the one that had just blown by, tore the sound away from El's ears, and she desperately looked at him, unable to understand what he was saying.

"I can't hear you!" she yelled, and Mike nodded, seemingly understanding.

So he leaned in and kissed her. El blinked in shock a few times before closing her eyes and falling into it herself, enjoying the moment as they stood together, a bastion of stillness and tranquility against the wind that roared around them...

They slowly broke apart, both slightly panting, as the wind died down.

"That was... that," Mike muttered.

"Yeah," El replied, beaming.

There was a short silence as they both digested what had just happened.

"So, Valentine Dance?"

"Yes."

A/N: This is the first part of a two-shot that will conclude with "Dance the Night Away".

10. Dance the Night Away

A/N: Second part of the two-shot that began with "When It Happens".

February 14, 1986

"You look so handsome," Karen Wheeler commented, looking over her only son. For the occasion of the Valentine's school dance, Mike had gone and used some of his own spending cash to rent a tuxedo for the night – definitely not a cheap thing to do, but given that he was going to be spending the night with Eleven, it was well worth the cost to him. Staring at his reflection in his sister Nancy's room, he shifted the bow tie – an actual one, taken from his father's drawer and tied by his mother – feeling uncomfortable with the top of his dress shirt buttoned, tight, and constricting his throat.

Still, Mike had to admit that he looked *good*; since entering high school, he had gained quite a few inches in height and no small amount of muscle either. The result was that the rented tux fit him perfectly, showing off his height and broad shoulders. Messing with his hair, which was admittedly rather long and somewhat difficult to manage, he finally sighed and nodded at the sight of his own reflection. Good was good enough.

The drive to the Byers' home was silent, though his mom tried her best to engage her quickly-growing-nervous son in conversation. Nervousness was the name of the game – he could feel the lead weight in his gut, the butterflies fluttering about, and the meatloaf he had for dinner coming up again. The familiar scenery flew past as they made their inexorable journey toward what was to come. All too soon – or, perhaps, not soon enough – they pulled onto the gravelly front of the Byers' house.

Mike slowly exited the car, his mother, who was smiling and prodding him out, remaining behind to let her son do it alone. Each step toward the front door seemed like an eternity, and the few stairs up to the front porch of the house were a struggle, as if his legs were chained down and Mike had to fight to raise them up each step.

Finally, he found himself but an arm's length away from the front door.

Mike swallowed. He gulped. He breathed in. He breathed out. He blinked a few times.

He knocked.

The door swung open almost instantly, and Mike was taken-aback by the sight of Jonathan, who had, evidently, been sitting right beside the front door. Even though the two knew each other fairly well (or however well a high schooler could know a middle schooler) and were on good terms, Jonathan's eyes seemed rather pointed on this particular occasion.

"I assume you're here for El?" the older boy asked, one hand clutching his camera while he looked down on Mike. He nodded. Jonathan gestured for the younger boy to enter while waving to the waiting Mrs. Wheeler, who waved back and returned to her novel. Jonathan closed the door behind Mike, and told the younger boy to stay where he was while the high schooler went off towards the bedrooms.

Mike fidgeted in place, turning around as he examined the house he had memorized in detail over many years. He pulled slightly on his bow tie, feeling like it, and his dress shirt, were conspiring to choke him before he made it to the party. The nervousness that was rising in him was like a storm. He could swear that his leather shoes were shrinking from the size they were when he bought them, squeezing his feet as he stood. Closing his eyes, Mike took deep breaths in and out to try and stabilize his breathing, to try and compose himself before he made a fool of himself in front of El...

"Mike?" the familiar voice echoed out softly, and Mike's eyes snapped open.

And he promptly forgot how to breathe.

She was absolutely breathtaking, if he had any breath left to take. She was like an angel – pure and majestic, and she only looked more like that. The cream-colored dress was rather conservative, but on El, it hardly mattered. Her hair had been styled in her usual manner, the

short curls giving her a distinctive look. Evidently, Joyce had applied some makeup on her adopted daughter, and on El, who rarely wore makeup in the amounts that she did now, it was noticeable and eye-catching. All-in-all, she looked like a model.

Mike's breath finally came back.

"Wow."

El smiled a little at that, amused by Mike's whole reaction to her appearance. Behind her stood Jonathan and Joyce, who were both sporting small grins at Mike's reaction, while Will, who had just come out of the bathroom, similarly found Mike's expression hilarious.

"U-um, will you accompany me to the dance?" Mike stuttered, trying to remember the ridiculously nerdy and over-the-top lines he had memorized just for the occasion. He extended his hand, and El daintily took it, lips still drawn in a grin. Spinning around, she beamed a large smile as Jonathan raised his camera. Mike, for his part, did his best to look ecstatic, which wasn't hard considering he was. The elder Byers brother snapped a picture, before looking down and exclaiming 'wow'.

Needless to say, they kept that particular photo for a *good* number of years.

After being waved off by Joyce, Mike and El made their way to the Wheelers' car, where, like a true gentleman, Mike held open the door for El before entering the other side of the backseat himself.

The drive to the school was fairly quiet, with Mike and El sharing a couple of glances but not saying too much. Mrs. Wheeler, for her part, refrained from any questions, contenting herself with the looks her son was giving to the girl sitting beside him.

"Have fun! And make sure to not do anything stupid," Mrs. Wheeler stated through an open window, as El and Mike got out of the car. Mike nodded, and Mrs. Wheeler, satisfied with response, rolled the window back up and drove off, leaving the teenagers to their own devices.

The dance was much like they expected, having gone to the Snow Ball before during middle school. The most noticeable difference was that instead of winter-based decorations, the coloring was redder, in theme with hearts and Cupid. Instead of immediately heading to the dance floor, the couple moved to find their friends, who were seated at a table. Lucas and Dustin sat at a small table, Max to one side of Lucas. El and Mike plopped themselves down at the open seats, enjoying the punch that came with each table. A few minutes later, Will joined them, having been brought to the dance by Jonathan just a few minutes after El left with Mike.

"You look really pretty, El," Max politely complimented, sipping on her punch. El blinked a few times, before softening into a smile.

"Thank you, Max. You do too." Max looked surprised at the compliment – a rarity from the psychokinetic girl, especially towards her – but took it in stride.

After conversing for a while longer at the table, Mike noticed that the song was slow, and he turned to El. Gulping, he put his best foot forward.

"El, would you like to dance?" She put down her punch, and nodded.

The two stood up, and out of the corner of his eye, Mike could see Lucas doing the same with Max, who reacted much the same way El had. As the two couples made their way to the dance floor, Dustin snorted, drinking more punch.

"We don't need those suckers, right Will?"

The smaller boy began to nod, but as he did, he felt a tap on his shoulder. To the side stood one of his classmates, one that he was rather ambivalent to.

"Um, hi Zo- I mean, Will. I was wondering if you wanted to dance with me?"

Will's eyes were like saucers. He had not been expecting someone to *ask him* of all people to dance. Still, knowing an opportunity when it presented itself, the quiet boy nodded, and he made his way, with his

newfound date, to the dance floor.

Now left alone, Dustin huffed, grabbing more punch from the center of the table.

"Whatever."

On the dance floor, those that were dancing enjoyed themselves as they held their other close to them. It was slow, but that was alright – such things were best enjoyed slow. El leaned closely into Mike, and he did the same with her. They spun slowly in circles, moving rhythmically to the beat of the music, enjoying being with each other and their friends.

Slowly, Mike moved his head to better face El.

"You know, El," he started, drawing her attention, "since the moment I saw you, I've felt connected to you. You've always been special to me." El didn't respond, opting instead to close her eyes and nod.

"What I'm trying to say, you see, is that... I love you."

"I know," she replied.

The silence was there, even amidst the surrounding sounds and music.

"I love you too," El softly whispered.

It was as if the music had stopped and time had frozen. It was as if there were a cosmic spotlight that had turned on for them. There was nothing else but them. And, when Mike thought about, there was never anything but them for him. Not since she entered his life. It was an irrevocable change, but one he welcomed – he couldn't bear to imagine what life would be like without El. He made a judgement call – she was what he cared about the most in the world.

Their lips touched, and then their kiss deepened as they fell into it. It was the most natural thing in the world to Mike. It was the sweetest thing in the world to El. Better than D&D. Better than Eggos.

The night was still young, but they were more than willing to dance

it away. Together.

It wasn't as if anyone could tear them apart.